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The Charmed Reboot: What Went Wrong? (Part 5)

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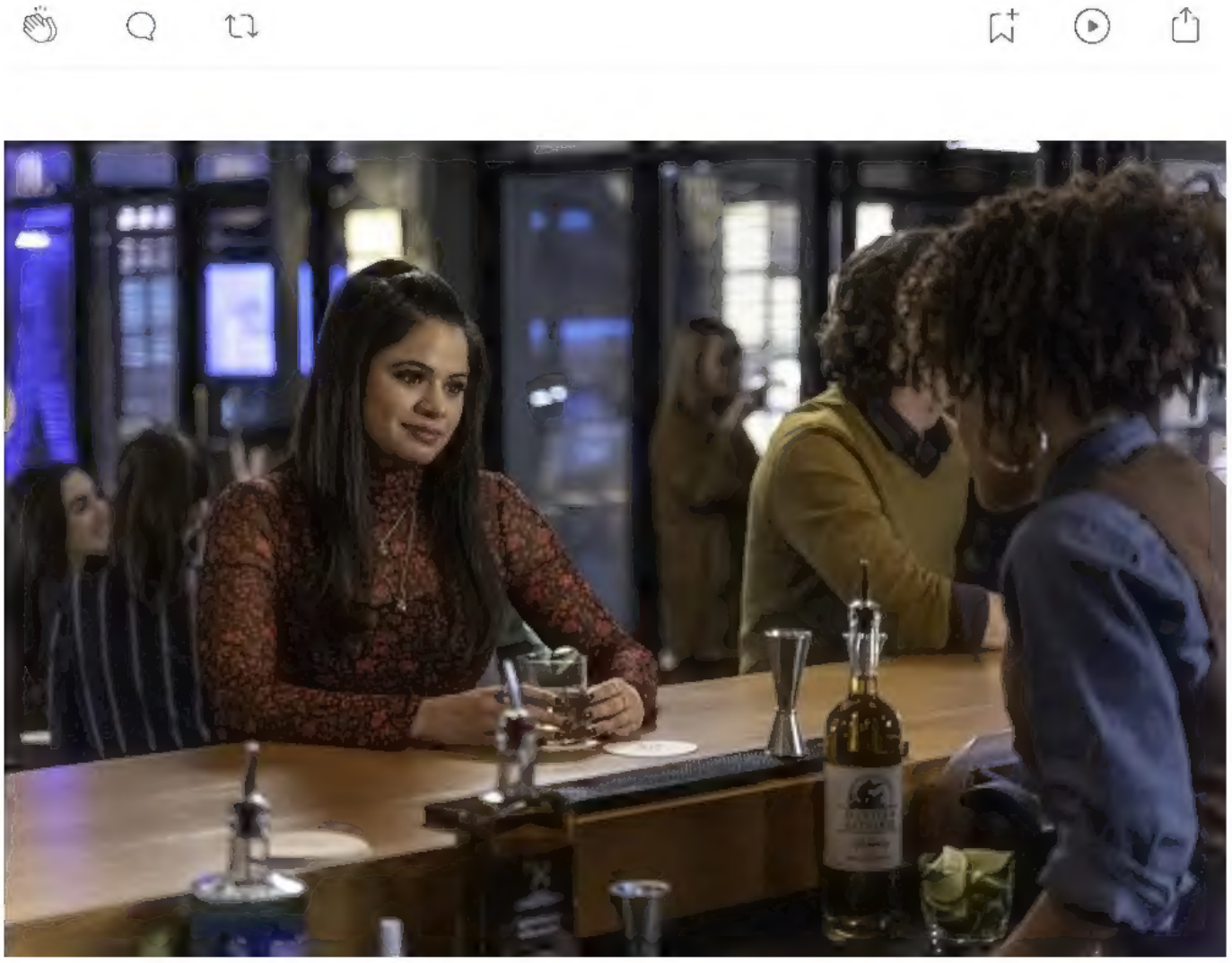

Image from The CW

The final instalment in a series of articles critically evaluating the pitfalls of The CW's Charmed Reboot.

In this conclusive chapter of my adjudication of the decline of the Charmed Reboot, and the moment (or moments) it threw the baby out with the bath water (and literally disposed of the entire house, to boot) in its attempt to make the series more serialized and streamlined and simplified after a delightfully chaotic Season 1, I want to focus on its anticlimactic usage of villains, its perfunctory follow-up of plotlines and its binding attachment to a certain character and how these factors combined with a smattering of several other errors unfortunately resulted in an unsalvageable show.

Lets summarize the fundamental issues that plagued the series following the showrunner change:

Destruction of the sisterhood: This is unconscionable. I can forgive the abrupt change in powersets, and I can even overlook the relocation to Safe Space, but it is unforgivable that the writers went to such lengths to diminish and ultimately dismantle the sisterhood of the reboot Charmed Ones in favour of elevating Harry (Rupert Evans) and Abigael (Poppy Drayton).

It is repugnant that 2 white characters were consistently accorded preferential treatment within the narrative, thereby positioning these two characters as the respective focal points in a show that was originally centred around three Women of Colour. It would have been far less calamitous and tone-deaf to have given Abigael her own spinoff where she can condescend and castigate to her heart's content, but using her to repeatedly undermine and delegitimize the three sisters was absolutely abhorrent.

Tonal change: The show admittedly becomes darker but this change in tone is too incongruent and contrived. It does not provide a good enough vehicle for the meaningful exploration of "dark" subject topics or storylines that can push the sisters and the show to newer heights. This darkness is a glorified Instagram filter — the illusion of darkness but all the depth and pathos of a fish on a bicycle. The darkness is vapid and inconsequential, thereby invalidating the tonal change.

Season 1 was great because it was so sprawling and labyrinthine in its scope of storytelling avenues and it could oscillate between dark and froth from episode to episode or even within episodes. Season 2 is severely lacking in this versatility. It suffers greatly for trying to make the show something that it is not.

No compelling villains: It's ironic that a season that was supposed to mark a dark epoch for the show is conspicuously short of an attendant villain. Abigael could have and should have been that villain but the writers decide to subject her to a questionable redemption arc of sorts. A redemption enables the writers to exonerate and absolve Abigael of her past wrongdoings and frame her as an individual that was merely misguided and troubled and not as someone who has committed unscrupulously terrible crimes against The Charmed Ones and the wider magical community. A redemption arc also enables the writers to apportion the lion's share of character development and narrative real-estate to her person while the sisters languish in obscurity.

Image from The CW

To the point, this season does not have a primary villain for the majority of its runtime. I believe Jimmy was supposed to be the de facto antagonist but that was never going to work because you'd have to bolster him up inordinately so as to make him a believable threat. Jimmy ultimately proved to be a nuisance at best, and an ephemeral one at that because the writers do not effectively integrate him into the tapestry of The Charmed Ones as a whole. He's predominantly the bane to Harry and Macy's (Madeleine Mantock) conjugal existence. White Aunt Viv (Melinda McGraw) is haphazardly shoehorned into the back half of Season 2 to diminishing returns. As a villain she eventually fulfils her purpose insofar as she serves as a formidable adversarial threat to The Charmed Ones, but as a character she leaves much to be desired. She is lacking in complexity and in meaningful narrative connective tissue that would punctuate her dealings with The Charmed Ones. She's as bog standard a villain as they come, and her extirpation from the lives of our protagonists and the world at large is fittingly anticlimactic. An underwhelming sendoff for an underwhelming villain.

Image from The CW

Lack of action: In concordance with a deficit in adversarial entities, Season 2's creative malaise is compounded by a lack of consistent and captivating action. Powers and the attendant explosive utilities that accompany witchcraft aren't statutory requirements in a show like *Charmed*. You could have had an incredibly compelling narrative borne from the absence of powers, in which the sisters are forced to become more uniquely and unorthodoxly resourceful in lieu of their supernatural abilities. Ororo Munroe AKA Storm of the *Uncanny X-Men* was, to many, arguably at the nadir of her character writing when she didn't have her powers and still led the X-Men adroitly irrespective of what should have been a staggering limitation. The premise of them being powerless for an allotted period could have opened the show and the sisters up to a multitude of equally intriguing storytelling avenues — but that was not the case.

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They spent the better part of the Season 2 essentially twiddling their thumbs before they lucked onto new abilities and during this interim period plot contrivances would allow them to conveniently circumvent the crosshairs of all manner of demonic adversaries that would have seized the opportunity to make short work of disempowered Charmed Ones. I believe a possible thematic underpinning of Season 2 was the conceit of one not necessarily being defined by their powers, and how 'power' can be quantified by and derived from different sources. Sadly, this is not an angle that is explored satisfactorily. It was a terrible idea to have the sisters without their active powers and without The Power of Three without commensurately showcasing the dire straits that they were in as a result of being powerless.

The Command Centre/Safe Space: Again, these things are to the detriment of the show because of execution and not necessarily that they exist at all. That the girls have been uprooted from everyone and everything they knew and unceremoniously deposited into unfamiliar environs could have been the catalyst for compelling characterization and much needed insight into their pathologies on an individual and collective level, but this level of attention to meticulous character writing seemed to be too tall of an order for the executives that mandated the integration of these changes into the show. The show suffers astronomically from being so unrecognizable from what it was, and for not capitalizing off of the potentiality for interesting world-building that either Safe Space Seattle or The Command Centre could have offered the series.

In addition to the integration of characters like Kat (Shiva Kalaiselvan), Jordan (Jordan Donica) and Abigael, Ruby (Bethany Brown) was another great character in theory who was introduced in Season 2 that was concordantly maligned by the fact that she was not utilized efficaciously enough and that she spends the remainder of the show meandering about without a solid trajectory in mind for the character. Initially introduced as a bartender at Safe Space, she slowly but surely develops a dalliance with Mel that evolves into a full blown tempestuous romance.

Image from The CW

It is then revealed that she is of magical descent, but the caveat is that she is at odds with her magical heritage and thusly is not a practicing witch. This is an interesting element to explore because the series up until this point of Season 2, did not have a character that fulfilled this archetype or occupied this function within the tapestry of the narrative. Naturally, not much is done with this and Ruby does not even receive an episode that expatiates on her backstory until the fourth season!

My main point of contention with Ruby's character is that for reasons known only to those that were handling her character, she is largely treated as an afterthought and is also routinely demeaned either by the narrative or by specific characters. She is not utilized in a way that would endear her to the audience, and is generally treated as a negligible entity that the writers are now circumstantially obligated to do something with. They do not write her character with the same level of panache and elan that they do Abigael, and often time one is left wondering exactly what her purpose is supposed to be.

In the third Season they attempt to consummate her relationship with Mel after the instability and discordance created by the constricting limitations of The Allergy, but then contradict this progression in their relationship by having Abigael continually make advances towards Mel without Mel shutting these advances down completely. It's bewildering that the writers would do something like this to a black female character (but then again, not really) and reflective of a deeper structural incoherence and deficit of coordination within the writers' room that something like that would happen.

It should be noted that by this point Abimel (the portmanteau combination of the names Abigael and Mel) is a thing, and naturally it dwarfs Rubymel as the preferred endgame relationship for Mel. Ruby is great character whose potential is continually squandered by the writers tasked with developing

her. Her only crime is that she does not bear the colour of skin preferrable to the writers, as that is the only discontinuity or point of delineation between her and Abigael. And yes, I'm going there unabashedly and unapologetically.

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Over the course of these two pestilential seasons fraught with flabbergasting creative decisions, I have to commend the executives and their proxies for being successful at one thing: the destruction of the Charmed Reboot. These two seasons convey the dangers of bequeathing IP into the hands of those that are too diametrically opposed to it or too divorced from the essence of it. A show that was supposed to centre the perspectives of three Women Colour is colonized and cannibalized by the writers' insistence on centring white voices and perspectives. It's a tale as old as time.

This article marks the end of my retrospective on the Charmed Reboot and it is my hope that those who have made it this far have been thoroughly elucidated as to how something that started of well enough, was essentially railroaded and irreparably sabotaged beyond all recognition.

See you all in the next article!

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